

NATIONAL DROUGHT POLICY COMMISSION

Analysis of Existing Local Programs

Background

Public Law 105-99, 112 Stat. 641, provides, "*Sec. 4 DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION. (b)(3) review State, local, and tribal laws and programs relating to drought that the Commission finds pertinent;*"

Methodology

The National Association of Counties conducted a sample survey of member counties around the country.

Overview

A small percentage of counties reported substantial forms of local drought specific plans or programs in place. More than seventy-five percent of the 177 respondents indicated that they use Federal programs to respond during drought emergencies. Many reported their role in assessing and declaring the existence of a disaster as one of their functions.

Twenty percent of the 177 respondents have county or city drought assistance programs or regulations that include drought emergency response as well as water conservation plans incorporating drought contingency procedures. Most counties have emergency procedures for disasters, including drought, and communication channels to get information to their populations.

For wildland and urban wildland interface firefighting, local fire authorities usually work closely with the State Forest Service, Fire Marshals and Federal fire agencies where they have mutual interests. Local fire districts often have mutual aid agreements in place.

Larger municipal water providers do tend to have contingency plans and public education systems in place. These providers are usually owned by a county, municipality or as a special district. Smaller, rural systems often are run on historic precedent.

"Because water shortfalls are first local and regional issues, developing a drought plan is a critical part of drought mitigation.... The goals of these plans are to reduce the impacts of water shortages, personal hardships, and conflicts between water and other natural resource users. These plans should promote self-reliance by systematically addressing issues of principal concern to the region ... " (National Drought Mitigation Center website)

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Communication. Practically all jurisdictions have the ability to communicate programmatic information to their population on a routine basis and when in an emergency response mode. In disaster circumstances, County Commissioners, County Managers, Mayors and their press offices can be very effective. For routine communication, newsletters, pamphlets and the Internet are heavily utilized.

Mitigation. Contingency plans are a form of mitigation and most local jurisdictions have some coverage in this area through their local emergency operating plan, water and wastewater procedures or other related plans. Those that do not have specific drought plans tend to have a process for dealing with the hazard.

Monitoring and Prediction. The local jurisdictions generally rely on the state and Federal scientific and other communities for their monitoring and long lead predictive information. For example, the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Snow Survey Telemetry Network System for snowpacks and the six National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Climate Regional Centers for weather and climate are widely utilized. The State climatologists can be extremely valuable in providing, interpreting, and massaging the volumes of scientific information. States often have their own systems for monitoring streamflows and groundwater. We need to keep in mind that predicting drought remains a complex task on any level; but, increasing technologies provide positive improvement in this area.

Response. Most counties do not have their own drought- specific response mechanisms, but have the ability to request state and Federal assistance through the various avenues. The process, however, can be daunting due to the volume (over 88) of Federal programs and the number of agencies involved. Based on the extent of the impacts, states may use their emergency powers to declare a state drought disaster without or before asking for Federal assistance.

Additional information is available from the National Drought Policy Commission. You can access the information at the Commission's web site: www.fsa.usda.gov/drought. All files can be ordered in electronic format or hard copy. Write: National Drought Policy Commission, USDA/FSA/AO, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Mail Stop 0501, Washington, D.C. 20250-0501.

* A list of acronyms used in this file will print at the end of the report or the meanings for individual acronyms will display at the web site by clicking on the acronym.